

Message Text

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ORIGIN AF-08

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04 H-02

INR-07 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15

USIA-06 AID-05 EB-07 COME-00 TRSE-00 MCT-01 SAM-01

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FM SECSTATE WASHDC

TO AMEMBASSY KINSHASA

AMEMBASSY LUSAKA

AMCONSUL LUBUMBASHI

AMEMBASSY LONDON

INFO AMEMBASSY BRUSSELS

AMEMBASSY PRETORIA

AMEMBASSY DAR ES SALAAM

AMEMBASSY MAPUTO

C O N F I D E N T I A L STATE 214535

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS:ELTN, EMIN, ETRN, MILI, AO

SUBJECT: STATUS OF THE BENGUELA RAILROAD

1. THE DEPT HAS LEARNED FROM BRITISH SOURCES THAT ALL REPAIRS HAVE BEEN COMPLETED ON THE BENGUELA RAILROAD (BRR), INCLUDING THE REPAIRS OF THE DILOLO BRIDGE AT THE ANGOLAN-ZAIRIAN BORDER. THERE IS APPARENTLY NO LONGER ANY TECHNICAL REASON WHY TRAFFIC CANNOT MOVE FROM ZAIRE TO LOBITO.

2. IN JULY THE MPLA AUTHORITIES IN ANGOLA PRIVATELY INDICATED TO ZAIRE AND ZAMBIA THAT THE ROAD WOULD SOON BE RE-
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OPENED TO INTERNATIONAL TRAFFIC. HOWEVER, IT APPEARS

ATTACKS BY UNITA FORCES AGAINST THE ROLLING STOCK OF THE BRR ARE CONTINUING. THESE ATTACKS HAVE APPARENTLY CAUSED THE MPLA TO RECONSIDER ITS PLANS TO OPEN THE LINE TO INTERNATIONAL TRAFFIC FOR FEAR ITS INABILITY TO GUARANTEE SECURITY IN ITS OWN TERRITORY WOULD BE AMPLY PUBLICIZED.

3. HOWEVER, THE ANGOLAN GOVERNMENT PUBLICLY CLAIMED ON AUG 12, THAT THERE WAS NO SECURITY THREAT TO THE RAILROAD AND THAT ONLY UNSPECIFIED "TECHNICAL REASONS" PREVENTED REOPENING THE LINE TO TRAFFIC FROM ZAIRE. THEY BLAMED "IMPERIALIST SPECULATION" FOR REPORTS THE LINE WOULD SOON REOPEN. THEY ALSO THREATENED TO CUT OFF ZAIRE FROM USE OF

THE LINE IF IT CONTINUED TO SUPPORT TERRORIST ATTACKS INTO ANGOLA.

4. MPLA IS INCREASINGLY FINDING ITSELF IN A PARADOXICAL POSITION ON THE QUESTION OF REOPENING THE BRR. IT WOULD LIKE THE REVENUE AND THE PRESTIGE OF BEING ABLE TO POINT TO ITS ABILITY TO KEEP THE LINE OPEN, AS WELL AS THE INCREASED POLITICAL LEVERAGE IT WILL HAVE OVER ZAIRE ONCE THE FLOW OF TRAFFIC IS DEPENDENT ON THE MPLA'S GOODWILL. HOWEVER, IT CANNOT AFFORD THE ACUTE EMBARRASSMENT WHICH WOULD RESULT FROM INTERNATIONAL AWARENESS THAT UNITA IS HARASSING RAIL TRAFFIC IN THE HEART OF ANGOLA, OR, WORSE, THE NECESSITY TO ADMIT THEY COULD NOT KEEP THE LINE OPEN. GIVEN THE HUNDREDS OF MILES OF TRACK THROUGH ALMOST UNPOPULATED REGIONS IT SHOULD BE A SIMPLE MATTER FOR UNITA TO SABOTAGE THE LINE OR ATTACK SELECTED TRAINS. ADEQUATELY PROTECTING THIS VAST LINE SEEMS BEYOND THE PRESENT ABILITIES OF THE MPLA AND THE CUBANS.

5. WE REMAIN INTERESTED IN ANY FURTHER INFORMATION AVAILABLE ON THE STATUS OF THE BRR AND PLANS TO REOPEN IT.

OF PARTICULAR INTEREST ARE ANY INDICATIONS OF A "DEAL" BETWEEN UNITA AND ZAIRE OR ZAMBIA TO PERMIT TRAFFIC TO TRANSIT THE LINE UNIMPEDED. KISSINGER

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